

### [East Valley Tribune](#)

Paul Giblin

The state and country need to improve their respective "economic infrastructures" to stave off a recession and keep economically competitive in the future, Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., told business leaders in Scottsdale on Thursday.

He said the country's financial stability has endured several challenges during the past few months. Among those: the rising costs of energy, food and health care, a post-Depression record number of home foreclosures, and an uptick in unemployment.

The first-term Democrat said he supported two recent short-term measures to bolster the economy - the Federal Reserve's interest rates cut to the federal funds rate, and Congress' approval of an economic stimulus package that will send tax rebates to millions of Americans by early summer.

Those measures will address the immediate needs of the economy, easing pressures on homeowners and small-business owners alike, Mitchell told about 140 attendees at an Arizona Chamber of Commerce meeting at the Chaparral Suites Resort.

For long-term improvements, he outlined several objectives, such as investing in roads and airports, improving educational opportunities, extending President Bush's 2001 and 2003 tax cuts, and revamping national energy policy.

All those measures will have direct benefits in Arizona, said Mitchell, who represents the 5th Congressional District covering Scottsdale, Tempe, Fountain Hills, Ahwatukee Foothills and east Mesa.

"One of my primary responsibilities is to use my position to do what I can do to enhance the economic opportunities and prosperity right here in Arizona," he said. "Especially in these times

of uncertainty, I want to do what I can do to keep Arizona moving forward."

Arizona must continually improve its transportation infrastructure to allow the state's economy to match its population growth, Mitchell said.

In that effort, he secured \$1.75 million in federal funding to improve taxiways at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport last year. The East Valley airport should be developed further as a reliever to Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, the eighth-busiest airport in the country.

"If we don't have the capacity, it's going to be a stranglehold on our economy," Mitchell said.

He noted that in 2002, Gateway recorded 1,000 passenger departures, just a fraction of Sky Harbor's commercial traffic. Yet Gateway's economic impact was pegged at more than \$250 million that year. "In fact, Gateway's economic impact is almost that of the Super Bowl," he said.

The former high school civics teacher also reminded the largely receptive crowd that he voted with the new Democratic majority in the House last year to lower interest rates on college loans and to expand the Pell Grant program.

Next, he said, lawmakers and school officials need to find ways to bolster and encourage science and math education in order to keep pace with countries such as China and India, which are producing a combined 1 million engineers annually. In comparison, the United States is graduating 70,000 annually.

"We need people to go into the science areas where they can be creative and innovative," Mitchell said.

Jeff Hatch-Miller, one of at least five Republicans planning to run for Mitchell's seat in the fall, gave the incumbent high marks for the speech.

"He did a great job," said Hatch-Miller, a member of the Arizona Corporation Commission, who attended the meeting. "The policies sound like Republican policies - lower taxes, support for business and industry. Those certainly are things that I can support. I've worked on economic development for 25 years and I'll tell you what, that's something the state needs."

However, Hatch-Miller differed with Mitchell's hands-on approach to directing federal funding for transportation projects. "I'm not sure that Congress is the place to decide where to put the bucks here in Arizona for infrastructure. I think that we have a strong Arizona Department of Transportation. I think we have a regional planning mechanism to look at those needs," he said.

Hatch-Miller said that his approach would be to defer to state authorities on such issues.